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Solidarity Reloaded: Volunteer and Civilian Organizations during the Migration Crisis in Hungary

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Abstract: The article examines the movement of grassroots organizations and volunteers in Hungary that suddenly emerged during the European migration and refugee crisis in 2015. This movement emerged in a society with low level of trust and high level of xenophobia, without any relevant previous examples. This movement was built from scratch via Facebook groups and provided humanitarian aid for the refugees and migrants on streets and railway stations of major cities in Hungary as a response to the lack of sufficient aid by the official relief organizations and the state. The analysis is based on various qualitative data sources and covers the motivational structure of the volunteers and grassroots organizations, their operational methods, including the nature of cooperation and conflicts that emerged during relief work. In addition, the article also deals with the attitudes and (the lack of) activity of the established charities and other NGOs. The study reflects on the political context and the public debates and also analyses the role of online and social media during the migration crisis, focusing on the summer and fall of 2015.

Keywords: refugee crisis, volunteers, grassroots organizations, Hungary.

Introduction

The year 2015 was a turning point in the refugee and migrant crisis,¹ both in Europe and in Hungary. Although in recent years there had been a marked increase in the number of registered asylum-seekers in Hungary, in 2015 the highest number of refugees and migrants reached Hungary's borders since World War II. Within a year, about 390,000 people passed through the country, of which only 177,000 were registered as asylum-seekers by the authorities. The great majority of this heterogeneous migrant

¹ In this paper we use various terms for the people who travelled through Hungary as part of the flow of migration in 2015. Besides the general umbrella term 'migrants', we also use the terms 'asylum-seekers' (which is legally applicable to migrants who started their asylum applications) and 'refugees' (the latter is technically a legally inaccurate term, but one often used in both the Hungarian and European public discourse and media with respect to the individuals involved).

population did not consider Hungary to be their destination country, but only a transit country on the way to their final destinations in Western Europe (primarily Germany and Sweden). Countries along the Western Balkan migration route were faced with an ever-increasing number of migrants. As they established direct contact with the local population, volunteers began providing assistance in multiple countries and cities, including Hungary. The relief work largely relied on the activities of civil volunteers and grassroots organizations that popped up unexpectedly across the country at the beginning of the migration crisis, especially in cities where the masses of asylum-seekers and migrants spent several days while waiting before continuing their journey to their target countries.

Despite the existence of enthusiastic volunteers and grassroots organisations, the Hungarian population in general can be described as highly xenophobic (Sik, 2016) with a low level of trust in general (Tóth, 2009; Boda & Medve-Bálint, 2012; TÁRKI, 2013) and a tendency to demonstrate exclusionary behaviour towards marginalised groups (e.g. various nationalities, ethnicities, religions or lifestyles). According to self-reported responses collected through quantitative research, 3 percent of the Hungarian adult population participated in refugee relief work or made donations during the summer of 2015, and 7 percent claimed to have a friend or an acquaintance that participated (Bernát-Sik-Simonovits-Szeitl, 2015). At the time around 5 percent of the population could be considered xenophiles, which group could overlap significantly with those that volunteered. However, such a large scale civil activity was rare in the last decade and considering its target group, it may even have been unprecedented, therefore we believed it to be worth being studied.

Research conducted in the autumn and winter of 2015 by the TÁRKI Social Research Institute (Simonovits-Bernát ed. 2016) explores the contradictions of this phenomenon: how new forms of civil activity emerged in a society that, in general, demonstrates a low level of solidarity towards 'strangers' and 'others' and which can be characterized by a lack of trust. How is it possible that in a society with such a restricted set of values and a tendency to deny the rights of 'others' and disparage diversity sprung up a dedicated and effective voluntary movement without an organizational history such as that of established charity organizations? The research also covered various pre-existing agencies, typically large relief organisations and NGOs, that were already actively helping refugees and immigrants and engaging in aid activity.

Based on the above-described research, our study presents and analyses the motivations and attitudes of volunteers and their grassroots organizations, as well as the established charities which helped migrants during the 2015 Hungarian migrant crisis.² Our study is based on individual interviews and focus groups with individuals who volunteered (see Table A1 in the Annex for more details).

2 This paper focuses only on the events of 2015 and does not deal with the events of 2016 and their effects.

The organizations that actively took part in the relief work can be classified into four main groups: (1) established charity or aid organizations; (2) NGOs with a mission linked directly or indirectly to asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants; (3) brand new volunteer-based, self-organised grassroots groups; and (4) international organizations (for more background information about the organizations analysed in this study, see Bernát, 2016). Analysis of these organizations is primarily based on the interviews and focus groups carried out with the leaders or prominent members of these organizations between October 2015 and January 2016 (see Table A2 in the Annex), and almost all findings are restricted to those organizations that shared their opinions and experiences with us, while opinions about other organizations' activities are articulated only in a few cases and are based on interviews with other organizations or other sources. In addition to the interviews, we used other relevant sources of information in the analysis such as relevant online and social media content (Barta and Tóth 2016) and public lectures and discussions with leaders of organizations that supported the refugee crisis (see Table A3 in Annex).

The paper first briefly summarizes the social and political context of the migrant crisis in 2015. It then describes the evolution of the newly established grassroots organizations. After this, the motivations of aid organizations and individuals are analysed, and the typical manifestations of cooperation and conflict between domestic organizations and associations are described. Finally, we discuss the essential role that the media played during this period.

The social and political context of the refugee relief work

The evolution of the organisations that helped the migrants during this period (including grassroots and traditional aid organizations) and the role of volunteers are embedded in the national and local socio-political context. Accordingly, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the events related to the 2015 migrant crisis.

EU leadership figures engaged in a so-called “refugee welcoming” rhetoric, but their actual responses to events was indecisive. It is not only outsiders' critique but was also the opinion of some EU bodies.³ While most of the Western European EU states expressed their support towards migrants in general, Germany, the migrants' primary destination country, emphasized this message the strongest. The Hungarian government's strong anti-immigration rhetoric was almost unique; a message which the majority of the European leaders condemned. The first milestone may have been Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's statement at the commemoration of the victims of the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015; namely, that economic immigration should be curbed because immigrants “can only bring trouble

³ Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) published the following statement on 09/09/2015: „The present crisis has clearly demonstrated the inadequacy of the current political and institutional instruments and procedures including the Dublin Regulation on which the asylum policies of the European Union are based” <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=5759&lang=2&cat=>

to Europe”.⁴ The statement raised a great deal of attention both in Hungary and in Europe and was followed by an anti-immigration government campaign in the spring of 2015 along with a “National Consultation on Immigration”⁵ and a subsequent, country-wide billboard campaign. The democratic opposition (the left and the green parties) were unable to respond to the situation meaningfully, while the extreme right-wing opposition lost ground as the government’s communication expressed an anti-immigration message.

Neither state institutions nor official charity organisations provided sufficient humanitarian aid to the migrants crossing the country, so in response to the general passivity individual volunteers and new volunteer-based grassroots organisations started to emerge. Moreover, some general public services, such as some of the public transportation companies or the public sanitation services were also unprepared for this challenge that made relief work even more difficult.

It must be noted that, in addition to the above-mentioned factors, the new civilian volunteers and their organizations emerged from an inherently anti-refugee (Sik, 2016) and confidence-deficient country (TÁRKI, 2013). Moreover, Hungary last faced large-scale migration two decades earlier in the form of ethnic Hungarians from Transylvania, and asylum-seekers (many of them also ethnic Hungarians) from the war zones of Yugoslavia. The rise in the number of migrants was unprecedented in Hungary (and also Europe) in terms of the order of magnitude, composition and processes. Although governments had information about migrants heading towards Europe, they may have underestimated their number, their effect on new migrants and on human trafficking.

One of the most important feature of the refugee crisis was the use of new internet-based technologies. Facebook and other social media platforms played an essential role in facilitating the exchange of information between individuals and the organization of group activities. In addition, call and chat software programs and other information applications directly targeted migrants, while electronic maps and other practical applications created radically different opportunities compared to those available during previous waves of migration. All this was complemented by the intense presence of commercial and public media (television, radio, online and print media) which simultaneously shaped public opinion and events, and whose influence was also determining.

4 Orban: We do not accept economic migrants as refugees (Orbán: Gazdasági bevándorlóknak nem adunk menedéket , Index. hu, 11/01/2015): http://index.hu/belfold/2015/01/11/orban_gazdasagi_bevandorloknak_nem_adunk_menedeket/

5 The Hungarian Government put together a questionnaire with twelve questions which was sent to every voter as part of a national consultation concerning immigration, economic immigration and terrorism. The official reason for canvassing the opinion of voters was that “a change in the Government’s immigration policy requires wider social support”. (Source: official website of the Hungarian Government on 24 April 2015: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/national-consultation-on-immigration-to-begin>)

Theoretical framework

The aim of our explorative qualitative study is to foster understanding of how new forms of solidarity with migrants emerged in a society characterised by a high level of xenophobia and low levels of trust and civic involvement. The article examines some more of the related issues in depth, including what motivated volunteers to join the aid work, what challenges and conflicts organisations and individuals faced because of their involvement (or absence), and, finally, whether this humanitarian action may led to new forms of long-lasting civic commitment.

Solidarity and factors leading to the weakness of civil society

One of the initial questions addressed by the research is how this civil activity arose in a generally weak and passive civil society. Social solidarity is a key concept in various fields of social sciences from political sociology to social psychology or historical sociology (Moody & White, 2003). Therefore our original approach on solidarity is probably the closest to the theories of political sociology which focus on how solidarity among citizens builds social cohesion and how it affects the construction of civil societies and thus democracies (Putnam, 2000; Paxton, 1999).

In the case of Hungary, the civil society's weakness is well known among researchers, and it has been observed in several areas, from low civic involvement and participation (Hoskins et al, 2006) to the number of volunteers (KSH, 2012) or the highly apolitical behaviour of youth (Cross, 2012).

One factor that has weakened civil society is the lack of a connection between "civil" and "political" fields. Based on Arató and Cohen's model of civil society/the public sphere (Cohen & Arató, 1992), Gerő and Kopper found that, instead of a cooperative link between the political and civil field in Hungary, there is a need to strictly separate the two arenas. This led to what they call the "fake civil" discourse that made the relationship between the two spheres impossible, and the emergence of claims that the two should remain completely separate (Gerő & Kopper, 2011). This concept might originate from the transition period. During the democratization period of Central and Eastern Europe, the relationship between civil society and state was often seen as oppositional, hindering later cooperation between the two spheres (Howard, 2003).

Numerous pieces of research (Howard, 2003; Tóth, 2009; Sik & Giczi, 2009 etc.) have claimed that the weakness of Hungarian civil society is deeply rooted in the society's lack of general and institutional trust. In contrast to this, some researchers in the USA found no relationship between interpersonal or institutional trust and volunteering. Some findings even suggest that a lack of trust in others is what *motivates* people to engage in collective action (Oliver, 1984). This conclusion agrees with a study of the motivation of Hungarian volunteers which found that feeling of deception following the failure of institutions is one of the key drivers of volunteer engagement in social activities (Bartal & Kmetty, 2011).

Even though theories of solidarity, civil society, or trust could be discussed at length, this article focuses on whether the above-mentioned weakening factors appeared or played any role during the civilian relief work of the 2015 refugee crisis in Hungary.

Volunteerism and activism in the framework of the refugee crisis

Participants of newly emergent grassroots groups mostly referred to themselves as volunteers. In this study, the term *volunteering* is used to refer to any activity in which time is given freely, without financial reimbursement, for the purpose of benefiting another person, group, organisation or the common good (Wilson, 2000; Czike & Bartal, 2006). Volunteering may take many forms and be inspired by various sets of values. It occurs both in institutional and informal frameworks (Wilson, 2000).

Even though the grassroots groups certainly meet the above-defined criteria of volunteerism, their members have often been framed as social activists because of the highly politicized context of the refugee crisis in 2015. A Hungarian study conducted among members of the same self-organised grassroots groups that we investigated came to the conclusion that these volunteers were, in fact, social change activists who found volunteerism the most suitable vehicle for the expression of their emotions and political dissent (Kende, 2016). As volunteerism and social activism have many attributes in common, some researchers claim that there is no valid sociological reason for studying them in different ways (Marwell & Oliver, 1995). The motivation that leads to participation in this kind of work is similar with volunteerism and activism: an individual's socialisation, self-concept, values, self-protective attitudes, and the need for status, social recognition or social interaction (Horton-Smith, 1981; Batson et al., 1983; Borshuk, 2004; Clary et al., 1998; Esmond & Dunlop, 2004). Identity-based models assume that action is motivated either by a disadvantaged identity or a feeling of solidarity with disadvantaged groups, and that these identities undergo a process of identity politicization (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). Considering demographic attributes, it is mainly better educated members of the middle class who possess a wide range of resources and free time who join in both types of collective action (Wilson, 2000), although women are overrepresented in humanitarian work, while men and younger people are more likely to join activist groups or movements.

As for the Hungarian volunteers, Bartal and Kmetty found that values, social recognition and social interaction were the three main factors which motivated individuals to participate in volunteer work (Bartal & Kmetty, 2011). In an earlier piece of research, Czike and Bartal identified two main motivational structures among Hungarian volunteers: one traditional, and another the authors call a "new type" of volunteering. Within the frame of the traditional motivational structure volunteers desire to help those in need based on their (often religious) convictions; married, middle-aged women mainly belong in this category. New forms of volunteering are

more based on personal drivers such as the desire to develop a career or build a social network and are typical of the younger generation in need of professional experience (Czike & Bartal, 2006).

The above-listed motivational factors and demographic attributes increase the chance of involvement, but the best predictor of both types of involvement is former volunteering or activist experience (Damico et al., 1998; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Bartal, 2010) and those who belong to formal or informal groups are more likely to devote their time to good causes (Putnam, 2000).

A slight distinction can be made between the two types of actors in that social activists are oriented towards social change, while volunteers focus more on individual problems and often do not wish to disturb the status quo (Markham & Bonjean, 1995; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). To put it simply, volunteers tend to “care about people, not politics” and therefore often deny the political nature of their activities (Eliasoph, 1998). In political situations adverse to their cause, volunteers may engage in activist strategies in order to spread their messages or mobilise resources (Chambre, 1991), while for activists volunteerism might function as a tool in the service of a cause (Kende, 2016).

In order to incorporate both formal and informal types of relief work in the analysis, we refer to both members of official organisations and grassroots ones as *volunteers*. However, considering the possible influence of the highly politicised context of the refugee crisis, we did not exclude the possibility of activist strategies or self-identification.

The role of social media

As more and more groups and movements are organised online, the role of social media inevitably becomes the subject of scientific interest. Numerous movements are conceptualized as having been given life through social media; Wael Ghonim even called the events of the Arab Spring “Revolution 2.0”, referring to the crucial importance of social media (Castells, 2012; Fuchs, 2014). According to Castells, in terms of political communication social networking sites function as “counter-power” to the official channels of communication in which opposition points of view have less chance of being expressed because of political power relations, and therefore social media can serve as a base for further real-life political action (Castells, 2012). Critics of this positive approach label the political action undertaken on social media “slacktivism”, “clicktivism” or “feel-good online activism” which they claim has little-to-no effect on real-life events (Morozov, 2010; Fuchs, 2014).

Newly formed grassroots organisations clearly acted as a counter-power to government policies, but in the case of media use they were unable to dominate the field of communication. Media content analysis shows that, even though the new grassroots initiatives used social media frequently and quite successfully to spread

their messages and mobilise resources, most of their content was framed by official governmental communication which led to a reactive strategy of communications that failed to create an independent narrative (Barta & Tóth, 2016; Messing & Bernát, 2016). Dessewffy and Nagy suggest that the main characteristics of one of the newly formed Facebook groups (Migration Aid - MA) is its “rhizomatic structure” and function as an “information thermostat,” and it can therefore be described as an example of “connective action” (Dessewffy & Nagy, 2015) which refers to a new type of collective action based on social networking sites.

Regarding the social media, this study focuses on how volunteers themselves perceived the role of social media during their work, from the beginning of their involvement to the end of the main phase of relief work (after the locking down of the Serbian and Croatian borders in October 2015).

The evolution of grassroots organisations

In the early summer of 2015, a number of new, volunteer-based grassroots organisations emerged with the goal of providing humanitarian aid to migrants. In a surprisingly short span of time they managed to formulate a wide agenda and significantly raise public awareness and obtain influence. The role and weight of these grassroots organisations in public life was widely magnified in an already highly politicised atmosphere as their activities (which until then had been more traditionally conducted by the state or larger established civilian or ecclesiastical charity organizations) sharply contrasted with the anti-immigration message of the government. The activities of volunteering civilians were covered quite significantly in social media and in the press.

The number of migrants kept growing during the summer and early autumn of 2015, which also increased the scale of activities and public awareness of the grassroots organisations. Until the middle of September – when the closing of the borders was carried out through physical and legal means – aid was predominantly provided to migrants by volunteer civilians who believed that the absence of large established charity organisations during the summer was mainly politically motivated. However, established charity organisations held that the social work done on the streets by non-professionals (mostly) was unprofessional and excessive in relation to the number of migrants. Established charity organisations argued that in order to avoid giving superfluous aid to migrants during the summer, they would not lend their complete help and only marginally took part in the relief work. These organisations started providing aid – with a targeted referral group and the help of substantial financial contributions from the government – after the migration route suddenly changed from the closed Serbian-Hungarian border towards Croatia. Meanwhile, the role of the grassroots organizations was greatly reduced. At this time, large numbers of migrants disappeared from the public areas of major cities partly due to the state-supported

transportation of migrants from the check-in point (the Croatian-Hungarian border) to the exit point (the Hungarian-Austrian border). This period lasted one month, from mid-September to mid-October, until the border fences were made ready at the Croatian border.

After the route of the migrants was modified to avoid Hungary, a small but dedicated cadre of the grassroots organisations and established charity organisations continued their charity work at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 in neighbouring countries, following the hubs of migrant movement in Greece and the Balkans. In 2016 some grassroots from Budapest, Debrecen and Szeged, individual volunteers again started providing partial aid to migrants who were starting to return to Hungary in smaller numbers.

As for social media activity, the number of members of the Facebook groups of grassroots organisations markedly increased in June and July 2015. Until the reduction in the significant presence of migrants in Hungary, the larger groups, *Segítsünk Együtt a Menekülteknek – Let's Help the Refugees Together* (SEM), and *Migration Aid* (MA), based their operations in Budapest and had an online membership of 10,000 in closed Facebook groups that were established to help active members organize operational work. The open page of MA, which initiative was the easiest to join, and was designed to provide a floor for discussing pro-migrant opinions had amassed 35,000 'likes' within a few months. The closed operative groups tied to specific aid locations usually had a few thousand members: the closed groups dedicated to the three largest Budapest railway stations were MA Keleti (2,500 members), MA Nyugati (2,900 members) and MA Déli (1,200 members). One of the main MA bases outside Budapest was MA Debrecen (600 members). The largest grassroots group outside the capital, MigSzol Szeged, was founded at the end of June 2015 and had around 2,500 members. Membership of the individual groups rose remarkably fast, despite the fact that there were overlaps between the groups.

Due to the lack of adequate and representative quantitative research we can only non-representative observations and information about the composition of the volunteers. Above all, it is important to note that the volunteers who spontaneously participated in providing aid to the migrants constituted a heterogeneous group. What is known is that there were more women among the volunteers, but the organisations' leaders were mostly men. Nevertheless, a large number of volunteers were men and some women were represented among the leaders of volunteer organisations. The composition of the volunteers was variable according to age and education. However, some types of volunteers can be highlighted, such as students and teachers, and seniors or pensioners who had more free time due to the summer holidays or their activity status; also intellectuals and white-collar workers, and parents of small children who responded especially sensitively to the plight of refugee children. In summary, Hungarian society was widely represented among the volunteers. However, place of residence played a key role: not surprisingly, volunteers from the cities in

which help was needed were most numerous because the frequent (sometimes daily) provision of aid could only be undertaken by such 'locals'.

Motivational structures of volunteers, and the 'formal' and 'informal' organizations

One of the most important research questions at both the organizational and individual level is what drove the volunteering activity. The motivation of an organization and individuals may be similar to some extent, but there are some drivers that are specific to organizations and individuals. Moreover, the motivations, drivers and perceptions of newly emergent grassroots organisations and established NGOs may be different, even though they work in the same field with the same target group.

Internal commitment vs. bureaucratic 'duty'

Based on our analysis of the interviews and focus groups a slight distinction can be identified between "institutional" or "official" actors, including large established charities (due to their ties to state as social service providers) and grassroots volunteers regarding their main perceptions of their role as volunteers.

On the one hand, both members and experienced volunteers of official organisations believed that the provision of help involved both a personal commitment and a professional duty; a finding which is also revealed in their activities: a mixture of enthusiasm and following their own interests, but also a desire to operate according to specific rules and proven practices. Thus, the activity of larger, better-established relief organizations can be understood only if we take both factors into consideration. Many large charities and some NGOs were criticized for their low level of activity, or even absence from the field, especially in the first half of the refugee crisis in summer 2015. This was often explained by others as the result of the substitution of inner motivation or commitment by political motivation, but the slow processes which are typical of hierarchically structured organisations may also have been responsible for the delayed response to the crisis. According to our interviewees, one of the charity organisations was not able to mobilize volunteers because of their lack of willingness to help migrants, while the recruitment of staff and the rapid collection and supply of donations was also difficult for some organizations. In sum, there are potentially several explanations why these established NGOs and charity organisations received so much criticism: perhaps their activities were indeed virtually invisible; they might have responded to the challenge too slowly; they may have provided little or no help at some stages of the crisis; there could have been a lack of capacity in terms of financial resources, staff, volunteers and donations; organisations may have looked after their own interests and been unable to identify a way to participate more effectively without harming their own organisations; alternatively, a simple lack of commitment may also have been responsible for their poor participation.

On the other hand, most of the charities and NGOs which were accused of insufficiently participating in the refugee crisis considered their own contribution as sufficient and adequate to the situation (saying that providing more donations and services would have led to an excess of donations, or that their involvement was proportionate to their capacity in terms of paid and volunteer staff availability, resources, mission, etc.). A few organizations admitted that they should have done more, but they also mentioned the financial or any infrastructural obstacles that had hindered them.

The newly formed, volunteer-based, and, initially, hierarchy-free organisations were quite successful regarding resource and volunteer mobilisation. According to our findings, the main reason for their success was the 'low entry threshold', meaning that volunteers had only to get to one of the train stations and could immediately join in the work, or by bringing some food as a donation they could also be considered 'active'. Members of these groups claimed that their involvement was a response to the lack of humanitarian aid provided by official organisations and that they were mainly motivated by their desire to help others.

Besides commitment, the level of professionalism is also an important factor that may be used to sharply distinguish between the grassroots movements and the established charities and NGOs. The recurring question was whether the aid activities of the volunteers and their organisations were amateurish or professional. It would seem obvious that the established NGOs and charity organisations were the professional actors, while the new grassroots groups played the role of amateurs. However, the issue is not that clear-cut as individuals often moved between organisations. New NGOs were often founded or headed by professionals, and many active members were also social work professionals (or were engaged in other relevant fields), while aid-related professionals often moved over to work at the new grassroots organisations because they felt they were ineffective at their old organisations. All in all, although social workers, medical specialists, interpreters and other relevant professionals were significantly represented in the activities of the amateur grassroots groups, these new initiatives basically remained amateurish, especially at the early stages of the crisis, due to the very nature of newly established grassroots organisations.

In contrast, professional charities were sometimes also accused of a lack of professionalism by members of the grassroots initiatives, typically in relation to technical issues relating to the distribution of donations in the field. Although these claims may be based on less objective observations, the uncertain and rapidly changing conditions might have decreased the professionalism of some of the established organisations.

These kinds of accusations from both sides may originate in the competitive situation at some localities where multiple organizations were simultaneously providing aid. The existence of a competitive attitude could implicitly be discerned in almost all the organizations, both the established and new grassroots groups, and also

within the two types of organizations. This confrontation between ‘professional’ and the ‘layman’ approaches was the basis for many of the conflicts between the different types of organisations.

Individual motivational structures

Volunteer organisations clearly stressed that their main motivation was a desire to help for humanitarian reasons. However, at the individual level deeper analysis is necessary, but this was impossible to carry out based on our interviews. According to the main narratives of the volunteers we interviewed during our research effort, three types of motivational structure can be identified: altruistic, political and affected (Tóth-Kertész, 2016) (Table A1). These structures are not clearly defined categories (such as ideal types), but refer more to the main motivations for volunteering (i.e. there may have also been additional sources of motivation).

The main motivation of volunteers classified as *altruistic* was their ‘human’ desire to help, or feelings of pity for the refugees. They perceived asylum-seekers as an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that they wanted to help because of their internal motivation. This group represents the traditional motivational structure (Czike & Bartal, 2006), and is mainly comprised of middle-aged women who had entered aid work as donors, and later came to do background or field work. In the field their relationship to asylum-seekers was characterized by a process of trust-building. In some cases, volunteers focused on specific groups (e.g. mothers, families, or Syrians) as they only wanted to help those in need (according to the volunteers’ presumptions of need).

“With the first wave, we knew 100% that they were from Syria and Afghanistan, but later on many arrived from India and Pakistan too, where I do not believe are big problems and who I don’t think really need my help; I think they should go home” (female, 20, from Szeged, individual volunteer).

In the second group, in which the volunteers are referred to as being predominantly *politically* motivated, volunteers were primarily motivated by a feeling of outrage at the official policy regarding migrants and asylum-seekers. Outrage is considered the main trigger for participation in collective action by many scholars (Castells, 2012). Previous to their relief work, these volunteers typically took a stand against the government’s communication, either online (e.g. sharing anti-government Facebook posts) or via political action (e.g. destroying government propaganda billboards). Among our interviewees, these volunteers generally took part in operative work such as coordinating volunteer groups or liaising with official institutions. Personal encounters with migrants were usually sporadic and focused on official processes, not individuals.

Therefore the main difference between *the altruistic and the political* motivational structure is in how the individuals perceived their collective activities. In general, altruistic types could best be described as ‘actual volunteers’ while members of the

politically motivated group were more likely to show the features of activists regarding their main emotions and their focus on politics (Eliasoph, 1998). However, in some cases it was not always clear whether the desire to help or the emotional outrage was stronger.

“I wanted to show that our culture is helpful and that it protects people. I was raised religiously and it was thought in my family that we have to help. As for the billboard campaign, I was against it; I thought it was ‘not in my name’” (female, Budapest, individual volunteer).

In the third group *affected* volunteers claimed that their main reason for helping was personal involvement on the basis of their own experience as migrants, or because they had family members in the sending countries. Unlike the altruistic group, they considered the asylum-seekers to be part of their in-group (Tajfel & Turner 1979). The volunteers in our sample whose main motivation was due to their being directly affected had no previous experience of volunteering.

“Quite a lot of my fellow countrymen arrived, and I felt it was my duty to help” (male, 51, Szeged, Syrian).

In their volunteer work they usually acted as interpreters because of their language skills; two of them, being medical workers, also helped with healthcare. These individuals believed that, among the volunteers, interpreters developed the closest relationships with the asylum-seekers as the common language provided a basis for trust-building.

The borders were not always clear among the three motivational groups, as at the beginning of the refugee crisis volunteers were required to take part in a variety of types of work. More specialized positions were only developed later. We may presume that motivation (and skills) led the volunteers to fill the most fitting positions.

The above-described classification is not based on a large-scale sample; however, it may be considered a framework for better understanding the motivational structures of the target population, and can be used in further research.

Table 1 – Main motivation of individual volunteers

Motivational structures	1. Altruistic motivation	2. Political motivation	3. Affectedness
Main emotion(s)	Solidarity	Outrage	Duty, sadness
Type of work	Donation, background work. If needed: Fieldwork	Operative tasks, coordinating groups, communication with officials	Fieldwork: Interpreting, medical aid
Connection to migrants	Provision of aid In fieldwork, the main motive is trust-building.	Ends with assistance Less personal contact and experience because of the different types of work	Closest relationships Multiple contacts – the main reason is language, trust is the main motive
Narrative	Various	Objective, reflecting	Emotion-based

Source: Tóth & Kertész, 2016

Political involvement or neutrality?

The complex and debated political context around the refugee crisis and the aid work took a toll on every type of organisation: internal debates concerning political motivation or independence emerged in a manifest or latent way at many of the organisations whose members we interviewed. Regarding both the newly formed organisations and the established NGOs and charities, one of the main questions that arose during the refugee crisis was whether their motivation and activities were influenced by politics, whether individual or organizational, or by political actors.

Most of the above-described actors (both institutions and informal groups) that took part in the humanitarian work denied being politically committed or having connections with any parties, thereby emphasizing their political neutrality or apolitical nature. However, not only the political and public discourse and the media but also the organizations themselves located each other on the political spectrum, identifying the political interest behind the others' activities. Intense media scrutiny heightened presumptions about political affiliation.

Official charity organisations were often described as being close to the state or the government because of their general activity, including the provision of social care that fulfilled state functions, leading to the natural accusation that these charities are political tools; moreover they were members of the state Charity Council. Accusations were also levelled against them because of their belated and small-scale involvement during the first half of the migration crisis. This claim became even stronger when, after the Serbian-Hungarian border was closed, only three charity organisations were allowed by the government to provide humanitarian aid at the entry point at the Croatian-Hungarian border, using state and European funds.

Although the new grassroots organizations of volunteers were usually identified as oppositional actors (and an amendment to the asylum legislation further politicized

them by potentially criminalizing them as ‘human traffickers’ or ‘smugglers’; see Kallius, Monterescu, Rajaram 2016), this label cannot be extended to all volunteers, even though many of them acted due to some degree of (usually opposition-focused) political motivation. The activities of many others were based on solidarity or a feeling of being affected, as noted previously. One typical group of volunteers who took part in the relief work identified their activity as primarily humanitarian, with a focus on aid work, with political commitment remaining in the background. Nevertheless, the newly formed groups were criticized as being on the opposite side of the political spectrum, close to opposition parties, and even serving foreign interests. Within the “national” framework of the discussion about the refugee crisis that was represented by any actor with an anti-refugee approach, the organisations and volunteers became framed as “anti-national” actors (Hunyadi, Juhász & Zgut, 2016) whose “pro-refugee” behaviour threatened the safety of the country. Therefore, volunteers were labelled as “guilty of high treason”, “Soros-agents” (referring to György Soros, the Hungarian-American businessman and founder of the Open Society Institutions), or even as “terrorists”. During our focus groups and interviews, the majority of the volunteers claimed to have experienced verbal or physical abuse from other Hungarians during their volunteering work.

On the organisational level, the political status of the new grassroots groups was unclear for many reasons and became even more complex because they were particularly exposed to the lures of the left-wing opposition (and in some cases, felt exposed to threats from the extreme right) simply because they were newborn and were acting, in effect, against the government. This situation necessarily led to internal debate about the political commitment of the organisations, as no principles had crystallized out about with whom (and whom not) to cooperate. These debates sometimes created tension as members had different ideas, political commitments and self- or group-definitions. As mentioned previously, one of the main motivational narratives of the volunteers we interviewed was their personal political motivation, a fact which can be explained by the heavily politicized social context of the refugee crisis. Core members (“leaders” or “founders”) of the groups seem to have undergone a process of collective identity politicization as their new group identities took precedence over other collective identities (during the time of the refugee crisis), conflicts led to strong identification with the group, and volunteers described continuous power struggles with state officials and politicians (Simon & Klandermans, 2001). However, not all volunteers strongly identified with their groups, as they often switched roles and organisational frameworks during their relief work. Even those volunteers who underlined their outrage regarding the government’s politics of the time highlighted the humanitarian nature of their work and referred to it as “civil collective action” or “humanitarian aid”, but not as a movement.

In order to answer the question of this chapter, we state that instead of getting involved in party politics or letting political actors influence the aid work, grassroots aimed to remain as neutral as possible.

This strategy of both formal and informal actors can be described as “politics-free-politics”, which generally means party-free politics. During the migration crisis, similarly to with their previous experiences, civil actors seemed to presume that maintaining this distance served their cause, whereas – according to a study by Gerő & Kopper (2011) – this tendency to separate party politics and civil politics may actually weaken civil society.

The use of online and social media

During the summer and autumn of 2015 the refugee crisis was one of the main topics covered by the European media. Based on the commonly acknowledged power of social media and the online press, almost all the actors in the crisis (politicians, NGOs, charities, grassroots) used these channels in a very conscious way, and they also showed an example to other stakeholders of how to use such media in the future. All of the parties used the media according to their goals: the government, via its own media outlets, only gave voice to its own point of view, while the major media outlets, the online and offline press of the left-wing opposition, as well as the major commercial TV channels, presented the work of both the new and the established NGOs and organisations. The major aid organisations were initially absent from the media, but having received a barrage of criticism increased their media presence, while last but not least, the media was also effectively used by bellwethers among the refugees, who even demanded representation on occasion.

Social media, used at an intensity and with an effectiveness never witnessed before in Hungary during humanitarian activities, both by asylum seekers and helpers, played an eminent role during the crisis, and this was one of the most relevant lessons that Hungarian civil society learnt (For more on the role of online and social media in the refugee crisis in 2015, see Barta & Tóth, 2016; Bernáth & Messing, 2015). However, the very strong impact of online media and especially social media was no surprise at all: Hungarians themselves have never before had such a powerful influence on close-to-home contemporary events as they experienced during the emergence of such active and influential Facebook groups.

Social media was first and foremost a tool in the volunteers’ hand. It had three main roles for volunteers and grassroots during the events of the refugee crisis. First of all, it was a tool for involvement: most of our interviewees joined the aid work through social media - either directly or indirectly (after being recommended by an acquaintance or visiting the fieldwork). Secondly, social media was an organisational tool as donation lists, work schedules, practical legal information etc. were available online. Finally, Facebook, through the groups’ official pages, represented a way of communicating with a larger audience.

Considering the anti-refugee rhetoric of the Hungarian government, groups like Let’s help refugees together!, MigSzol Szeged, and Migration Aid can definitely be framed as communication platforms for those who disagreed with the official message of the

governing party. However, as regards the mobilising effects of social media, we must note that only in Debrecen did the volunteers organise themselves exclusively through social media, as the group's core members had never met before engaging in this voluntary work. In the cases of Budapest and Szeged, core members and founders had been in contact before as they had been friends or co-workers for years. Therefore the early mobilising effects of social media should not be over-exaggerated, as the aid work was started by a small group of people. In Szeged the founders of the group had known each other well for years and most of them had previous volunteer or activist experiences. As their example, as well as the Budapest-based Migration Aid group appeared on the news, it motivated many others for whose mobilisation social media served as a great tool.

As for the involvement of the volunteers, our interviewees from the grassroots organisations often referred to their previous engagement with social media, such as sharing others posts or making statements about the refugee crisis. These earlier forms of engagement through social media can be described (using Morozov's term) as "slacktivism": online activism with little to no effect on actual events (Morozov, 2010), although it did later lead to commitment to humanitarian work and was thus the first step in becoming fully engaged. Why did people join the refugee relief work after sharing articles, photos or statements about the refugee crisis? One of the potential answers is that people strive for consistency in terms of their commitment, while society rewards consistency and condemns inconsistent behaviour (Cialdini, 2009). Accordingly, after being active on social media (i.e. visible to friends and acquaintances), people felt that in order to be consistent in their attitudes towards the refugee crisis, they had to volunteer. According to this finding we state that engagement to a cause through social media might be the first step of civic involvement, if the actors of that cause provide the possibility of joining their work.

Conclusion

The flow of migrants who crossed Hungary prior to the summer of 2015 escalated to a level the country had never witnessed before. The rapidly rising number of asylum-seekers arrived in a country generally characterized by a low level of trust, solidarity and civil activity, as well as widespread xenophobia. These features were exploited by the government's anti-immigration policies promoted by an intensive communication campaign that included the use of billboards with anti-immigration messages. As neither state institutions nor official charities or NGOs took a leading role in handling the refugee crisis - they remained inactive or hardly visible during the summer -, citizens formed their grassroots groups via Facebook in order to provide help for those in need.

In our study we examined the role of both official organisations, mainly large charities and self-organised, volunteering grassroots groups, the motivation of volunteers, the political context of their actions and briefly the role of social media.

According to our results, two main factors distinguished large established charity organisations and informal grassroots groups: the perception of their role and their different approaches. Volunteers of self-organised groups joined the aid work only because of their inner commitment. For the established NGOs and charities the nature of their motivation was in question: did it involve real inner commitment, or was it rather a kind of “red tape and going through the motions” process that drove the organizations? Our findings suggest that some of the large established organizations rather perceived their involvement more as a bureaucratic duty, but volunteers and some migrant-specific NGOs that joined the work were driven by their inner commitment as well. Established charities put down the refugee relief work as a planned process according to specific rules and criticized civilians because of their amateurish methods which resulted excessive donations to the migrants. On the other hand, civilians accused established charities for underperformance and criticised them for being absent from the field, especially during the summer. Charities justified their low involvement in different way than state institutions. State actors’ activity was in accordance with the Government’s anti-immigration policy, while charity organisations claimed that they did not wish to provide excess aid to the migrants (but that they had provided help in sufficient amounts as the migration flow had not reached the extent which would have required large-scale intervention). Civilians and volunteers claimed, however, that the invisibility of the large aid organizations may have been politically motivated. Similarly, volunteers’ actions have been also framed as politically motivated.

Political involvement or neutrality was one of the main questions for all actors. On the individual level of motivations, we found three main motivational structures among volunteers that we labelled altruistic, political, and affected, which were differentiated by the main emphasized narrative. Volunteers with altruistic narratives joined the work mainly out of humanitarian reasons. Politically motivated volunteers were driven mainly by their political outrage, and affected volunteers were first or second generation immigrants, who felt involved because of their previous experiences. Even though political motivations played a role in many individuals involvement, we found that on the organisational level all charity organisations, NGOs and grassroots distanced themselves from political actors and parties, leading to rhetoric of “party-free-politics”. The “fake-civil” discourse also emerged as volunteers were labelled “traitors of the country” or “Soros-agents” suggesting their hidden, external and political agendas for joining the work. Our findings suggest that both the “party-free-politics” rhetoric and “fake civil” discourse weakened all the established NGOs, charity organisations and the self-organised groups themselves and encumbered cooperation between actors.

As for the role of the media, it was extraordinarily important in these grassroots movements. The inevitable role of social media, especially Facebook, was among the most important tools in the evolution of the movement as the grassroots groups

popped up on Facebook, as well as organized and promoted their daily activities using this site. The online press monitored the migration crisis, as well as the helping activity of the new grassroots initiatives, with growing intensity, and in doing so, contributed to the resupply of donations and new volunteers. Nevertheless, the media representation of the refugee crisis and of the grassroots movements was politically highly polarized. In any case, online media, alongside social media, played an extremely influential role, both from a pro and anti-migration perspective.

One of the main questions of our study was how new forms of solidarity could emerge in this social and political context. Apparently it was the complexity (or controversy) of the situation itself that had led to surprising outcomes. According to our results, the self-organised group's success of mobilization can be traced back to three main factors. First, their "low-threshold" model provided that volunteers could join the work with low effort – e.g. by providing donations or stopping at one of the railway stations where the grassroots were present. Second, as the topic of migration was present within the political discourse from early spring 2015, a majority of the volunteers had made previous statements regarding the refugee crisis which they could stay consistent to by joining the aid work. Lastly, as all of the studied grassroots emerged during the summer of 2015, they had little to no organisational models, rules or self-definitions. Therefore volunteers could define their work according to their own beliefs, values, or political ideas. Volunteering had a simultaneous message of solidarity and political dissent, thus individuals with different motivations and goals could be involved in the same collective action. In contrary to previous research we state that volunteers were not necessarily social change activists: describing the volunteers and grassroots initiatives as purely oppositional actors might be misleading and might decrease the significance of solidarity as the main driver of their voluntarism. Conversely, the actions of volunteers and grassroots cannot all be traced back to solely humanitarian reasons.

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Annex

Table A1 List of focus groups with grassroots members and number of individual interviews with volunteers

	date	city	participants				
			gender	age group	dominant educational attainment	total number of participants	
focus group							
			men	women			
MigSzol Szeged	10.15. 2015	Szeged	4	4	16–50 yrs old	tertiary	8
MA Debrecen	10.20. 2015	Debrecen	1	5	30–40 yrs old	tertiary	6
MA	10.28. 2015	Budapest	1	6	20–52 yrs old	tertiary	7
individual volunteer interviews							
	10.02-12.22.2015	Szeged, Budapest	6	10	20–50 yrs old	tertiary	16
sum	–	–	12	25	–	–	37

Table A2 List of organizations interviewed between October 2016 and January 2016

type of organization	Name of organization
grassroots organizations of volunteers	Migration Aid (primary open and closed Facebook groups, plus subgroups related to the largest Budapest and Debrecen railway stations: MA Keleti, MA Nyugati, MA Déli, and MA Debrecen)
	Let's Help the Refugees Together (Segítsünk Együtt a Menekülteknek, SEM, Budapest)
	MigSzol Szeged ¹
established civilian and ecclesiastical NGOs which were already assisting refugees	Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Magyar Helsinki Bizottság)
	Menedék – Migránsokat Segítő Egyesület (Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants)
	Magyarországi Evangéliumi Testvérközösség – Oltalom Egyesület (Hungarian Evangelical Fellowship - Oltalom Charity Society)
	Shelter Foundations (Menhely Alapítvány)
	MigSzol Migrant Solidarity (MigSzol Migráns Szolidaritás)
	Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary (Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház)
established large charity organizations	Hungarian Red Cross (Magyar Vöröskereszt)
	Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat)
	Hungarian Interchurch Aid (Magyar Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet)
	Hungarian Baptist Aid (Baptista Szeretetszolgálat)

¹ The name of the grassroots organization 'MigSzol (Szeged)' is identical to that of the NGO 'MigSzol Migrant Solidarity' and means the same. Although there is a genuine connection between the groups, the similarity with names is only a coincidence.

Table A3 Public events or discussions with the participation of organisations talking about their activity during the refugee crisis

event	organizer	date	venue	participants (representatives of organizations)
Menedék Workshop ²	Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants	20 October 2015	Gólya, Budapest	bishop of The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Hungary
Coffee to go, Migration: "Acceptance in this country and beyond our borders" ³	Hungarian Maltese Charity	3 November 2015	Main office of Hungarian Maltese Charity, Budapest	leading representatives of Baptist Charity, Hungarian Maltese Charity; Hungarian Red Cross, Jesuit Refugee Service
"The man with tattoo – Immigration through the eyes of volunteers" – Keleti Csoport (Keleti Group – volunteers of Migration Aid at Keleti Railway Station) ⁴	Zöld Terasz (Green Terrace) and moderated by a member of Párbeszéd Magyarországért Párt (Dialogue for Hungary Party)	26 November 2015	Zöld Terasz, Budapest	Three leaders of the Keleti Group
Teszik? Teszik! Civil segítők a menekültválságban. Hanuka Proaktív series. (Do they act? They do act! Civilian actors as helpers in the refugee crisis.) ⁵	Balint Jewish Community House (Bálint Zsidó Közösségi Ház)	9 December 2015	Balint Jewish Community House (Bálint Zsidó Közösségi Ház)	representatives of Migration Aid, MigSzol Szeged; Segítsünk Együtt a Menekülteknek (Helping the Refugees Together), and Menedék – Hungarian Association for Migrants.

2 <https://www.facebook.com/events/999756306746645/>

3 <https://www.facebook.com/events/1714923415394314/>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/events/1025431994174546/1033433036707775/>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/events/897929096961053/912454155508547/>